

303 Squadron: Thrilling Action, Real Life Heroes

By the summer of 1940, Nazi Germany had overrun almost all of Western and Central Europe, and Great Britain, the last Ally remaining unconquered, was fighting for its life. The young Polish pilots of the legendary 303 Squadron leapt at the chance to help beat back the enemy who'd stolen their country.



Aquila Polonica Publishing's newest book, *303 Squadron: The Legendary Battle of Britain Fighter Squadron* by Arkady Fiedler, is the thrilling minute-by-minute story of the men who won laureates from the King of England, were adored by the British public and caused the hearts of their fellow Poles to swell with pride.

303 Squadron, whose entire action takes place over the most critical two weeks of battle, brings to life the dazzling air combat that would secure forever the magnificent reputation of Polish fighter pilots: over the course of the Battle of Britain, whose 70th anniversary was celebrated this summer, 303 Squadron downed three times the average RAF score while incurring only one-third the average casualties.

On arrival at RAF Northolt airbase, the Polish pilots were an unknown quantity to the British. In the prior nine months, the Polish airmen had fought and then escaped the German and Soviet invaders in Poland, slipped out of Romanian and Hungarian internment camps, flown in combat in France until that country surrendered, then made their way to England. They spoke little English and were unfamiliar with the instrument panel of the Hurricane fighter planes. Little wonder British RAF commanders were skeptical.

Within weeks, however, British skepticism turned to appreciation, then awe and finally gratitude. On September 15, 1940, the deadliest day of the Battle of Britain, 303 Squadron really proved its mettle. Beating back the Germans' first crushing raid, the squadron set a record for victories: constituting less than 5% of the Allied squadrons defending the skies over England, the squadron destroyed nearly 16% of the enemy aircraft shot down.

Publisher Aquila Polonica has created the first English-language edition since 1942 of Arkady Fiedler's classic *Dywizjon 303*. For this new edition, Aquila Polonica has added extensive supplementary material not included in the prior edition—nearly 200 black and white photos, maps and illustrations, plus fascinating information about 303 Squadron's badge, song and Battle of Britain record, the story behind the Polish Air Force's flag, and biographies of the pilots that bring these heroes, who were oh so young at the time, to life. Some of the vignettes from the book:

Stanislaw Karubin looked no more than 20 and was little older. When a Messerschmitt tried to escape Karubin's Hurricane, the pilot took it as a personal challenge. Three hundred yards, 150, 100, 70...the black cross grew closer. Karubin felt a soldier's affection for his machine: a miracle, not a machine! Then, no! he was out of ammo. Determined to get this enemy, Karubin charged in so close to the Messerschmitt that the German lost his grip, and crashed to the ground.

On the first day of operations for 303 Squadron, after five of his fellow pilots bagged Messerschmitts **Zdzislaw Henneberg** wasn't about to return without his own. He flew to where he had spotted four more enemy aircraft, then belatedly realized he was without his wingmen. Instead of backing off, he followed the Germans like a wolf—attacking when the time was right. The Brits were astonished and delighted with these fearless fighters, each of whom returned to the airfield and performed a victory roll.

Even though his instruments were shot, **Jan Zumbach** outflung a trap laid by five Messerschmitts in what seemed to be a suicidal dogfight, and sent two Germans crashing to the ground that day. Shaken, dazed, but alive, Zumbach landed his plane and, smiling, asked for a cigarette and a glass of water.

Witold "Tolo" Lokuciewski spotted a Messerschmitt and fired off a few rounds. But it was a decoy: immediately several other enemy planes fell on him from above. Despite serious wounds and a half-shattered plane, Tolo had the satisfaction of seeing the decoy crash to earth before bringing his Hurricane into the repair shop and himself to the hospital.

Josef František was a cocky Czech pilot who stole a plane and flew to Poland when the Germans invaded Prague. Assigned to 303 Squadron and unleashed in the Battle of Britain, he'd frequently break ranks and head straight for the Channel Coast—against orders—to lie in wait for Germans. An incredible ace fighter pilot, František was with the Poles, body and soul.

After a grueling showdown with German Dorniers over the Thames, **Witold Urbanowicz** touched down to refuel. The airfield was oddly deserted—the Brits were in a bomb shelter sipping tea. At first, Urbanowicz was furious. But once refueled and airborne again, it occurred to him that a nation so imperturbable in the midst of a savage attack must surely win the war.

A clandestine edition of *Dywizjon 303* was parachuted into German-occupied Poland in 1943. Copies duplicated by the Polish Underground were secretly passed from person to person. This report of the successes of their fighter pilots, fighting in distant lands for freedom, boosted morale enormously in the beleaguered country.

"*Dywizjon 303* is required reading for school children in Poland," says Aquila Polonica president and co-founder Terry Tegnazian. "But we think the courage and accomplishments of these amazing pilots is something everyone will find riveting—from teenage boys craving adventure stories, to World War II enthusiasts, to those who just want to know more about Poland."

At the request of Arkady Fiedler's son for a new translation of *Dywizjon 303*, Aquila Polonica is proud to have been able to work with highly skilled translator Jarek Garliński, son of an AK veteran and well-known historian Józef Garliński.

Overseeing the production of this new edition, with its comprehensive appendices of biographies, ranks, "kills" and contextualizing history, required an enormous amount of time and attention to detail. As Tegnazian and Aquila Polonica co-founder Stefan Mucha discovered, conflicting data exists on nearly every aspect. They were therefore also fortunate to have two of the most well-respected experts on the Polish Air Force in World War II, Robert Gretzyngier and Wojtek Matusiak, both of Warsaw, to assist them.

The effort was worth it, according to Tegnazian: "The Polish heroes of the Battle of Britain deserve a place of honor in our hearts and on our bookshelves. The fate of the free world might have been very different without their superb efforts."

303 Squadron is available at bookstores and online retailers in hardcover. For more information visit www.AquilaPolonica.com.



Orange County News

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Fall is here and life for most of us changes somewhat in the fall season. Shorter days and longer nights let us slow down our pace of life, indulge in bodily and spiritual rest and enrichment, while savoring memories of the past summer experiences, and looking forward to the months ahead with a renewed spirit.

Life at the Pope John Paul II Polish Center in Yorba Linda also has changed a bit and is "back to normal" after one of the main annual events – the Dożynki – has come and passed. The celebration and excitement are now history, but happy memories of this event will linger for a long time. Memories of two days of festivities full of joy and laughter, music, dancing, entertainment, feasting on the Polish culinary specialties, sharing Polish customs, history and traditions, wonderful hospitality and friendship. Memories of seeing some old friends and meeting new ones. Memories of the gracious, loving community that spared no time and effort to carry on this beautiful tradition, and to spread happiness around...

Year after year the Dożynki at the Pope John Paul II Polish Center draws hundreds of people from near and far, who come to enjoy this social event, and participate in the traditional religious celebration of giving thanks to God. Truly, that's what Dożynki is mainly about – a symbolic celebration of gratitude to God for His abundant blessings and love throughout the year. Here at Yorba Linda – it is also a main fund raiser for the needs of our Polish Center. Hats off to Dariusz Świątkowski, Dożynki Chairman and his Committee, for the leadership, devotion, hard work, and the great success of Dożynki 2010. Congratulations to Irene and Ryszard Nowak - the Lord and Lady of the Manor.

Helena Modrzejewska Polish School in Yorba Linda opened its doors for another school year. The children (3 to 16) are learning the Polish language, history, culture and traditions, as well as religion, art and folk dancing. Under the directorship of Mrs. Elzbieta Rudzińska, the school is staffed by professional teachers from Poland and is holding classes on Saturdays. The classes which prepare children for the Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation also started.

On October 17th the Commemoration of the 32nd Anniversary of Pope John Paul II election to the throne of Peter, as well as the 26th Anniversary of Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko martyrdom took place at the Polish Center in Yorba Linda. A beautiful picture done by our local artists Barbara and Mark Mika adorned the presbytery during solemn Holy Mass, which was followed by laying flowers and prayers at the commemorative plaques. The event was sponsored by the Polish American Congress, Orange Chapter. □

Tall ship retracing Chopin journey docks in Dover

An article dated September 16 on the BBCNews website reports... Members of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra arrived in Dover on board the *Dar Młodzieży*

A tall ship from Poland is visiting Kent as part of a trip that aims to retrace a journey by one of the world's greatest composers.

The *Dar Młodzieży*, which is carrying the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, docked in Dover on Thursday.

Its visit to the UK is part of a European tour that follows a journey by Frederic Chopin in 1848.

The orchestra performed a concert at Dover Town Hall on Thursday evening.

The concert was organised by The Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London and the Polish Cultural Institute.

The *Dar Młodzieży*, which means "a gift of Polish youth", has made more than 100 voyages since it was launched in 1982.

'Landmark event'

It has already been to Copenhagen, Gothenburg and Oslo on its current trip and will sail to Boulogne once it leaves Dover.

People have been encouraged to visit the ship while it is docked at Prince of Wales pier in the town.

Chris Newey, of DFDS Seaways English Channel, which has backed the concert, said: "We are delighted to be part of a project which is bringing such renowned Polish culture to the people of Kent.

"The event will be a celebration of beautiful classical music, rich in the influences of Chopin, and we are looking forward to welcoming the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra to Dover for this landmark event."

BBC dedicated a weekend to Chopin

BBC Radio 3 broadcasted every note written by Frederic Chopin during a weekend dedicated to the Polish composer, who died in 1849 aged 39.

The Chopin Experience, which ran on 17-18 May, followed similar tributes by the station to Beethoven, Bach, Mozart and Tchaikovsky.

The weekend explored how Chopin revolutionised piano music, as well as his troubled personal life.

The weekend also included the most famous recordings of Chopin's work.

His set of 24 Etudes was aired in unbroken sequence featuring 24 different pianists.

Piano lessons

Dedicated programmes looked at the influence of Polish folk music on the composer - and how the composer continues to influence the Polish music scene.

Chopin settled in Paris in 1830 and died in the French capital from tuberculosis.

A child prodigy, his adult life was coloured by his volatile relationship with writer George Sand, the pseudonym of Aurore Dudevant, and his struggle with depression.

A dedicated website, launched as part of the Chopin weekend, featured video piano lessons by pianist David Owen Norris, for those who wanted to try their hand at some of Chopin's more approachable pieces. □

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